

Message Text

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SUBJECT: THE OUTLOOK FOR POLITICAL STABILITY IN ETHIOPIA

1. SUMMARY. A GREAT DEAL OF ATTENTION IS NOW BEING DEVOTED BY THE VARIOUS INTEREST GROUPS IN ETHIOPIA TO THE PROPOSED NEW CONSTITUTION. IT OFFERS THEM HOPE THAT A NEW ERA IS ABOUT TO BEGIN WHEREIN SWEEPING CHANGE WILL BE POSSIBLE ON A SOLID LEGAL BASIS. THE ENACTMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION MAY IN FACT PROVE TO BE ONE OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT DEVELOPMENTS OF THE GATHERING ETHIOPIAN REVOLUTION. FOR THE NEAR FUTURE, HOWEVER, THE APPROACH AND EVEN THE ENACTMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION ARE NOT LIKELY TO ALTER THE LIKELIHOOD THAT A PERIOD OF GREAT INSTABILITY LIES AHEAD WHICH CONTAINS MANY POSSIBILITIES FOR BLOODSHED AND RETROGRESSION IN ADDITION TO THOSE FOR PROGRESS AND REFORM. IT SEEMS UNLIKELY THAT EVEN A MODICUM OF STABILITY WILL DEVELOP UNTIL ONE INDIVIDUAL CLEARLY EMERGES AS THE WIDELY ACKNOWLEDGED AND ACCLAIMED LEADER OF THE NATION. EVEN IF SUCH A LEADER EMERGES, HOWEVER, THE ABSENCE OF POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF TRIED AND TESTED STRENGTH WOULD PROBABLY RESULT IN A BASICALLY UNSTABLE POLITICAL SITUATION SUSCEPTIBLE TO COUPS AND REBELLIONS. WE DO NOT BELIEVE, HOWEVER, THAT THIS PROSPECT AS SUCH CURRENTLY CALLS FOR BASIC CHANGES IN OUR PROGRAMS OF MILITARY, ECONOMIC AND DROUGHT RELIEF ASSISTANCE. END SUMMARY.

2. ALTHOUGH ETHIOPIA DURING THE LENGTHY REIGN OF HAILE SELASSIE HAS
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DEMONSTRATED A DEGREE OF POLITICAL STABILITY WHICH MUST HAVE BEEN

THE ENVY OF COUNTRIES AFFLICTED WITH FREQUENT CHANGES OF POLITICAL REGIME, ETHIOPIA AT PRESENT SHOWS EVERY INDICATION OF HAVING ENTERED UPON A PERIOD LIKELY TO BE CHARACTERIZED BY GREAT POLITICAL INSTABILITY. THE BASIC REASON FOR THIS IS THAT THERE HAS BEEN A RADICAL CHANGE AND EXPANSION IN THE GROUPS NOW PARTICIPATING IN THE POLITICAL PROCESS (PRIMARILY JUNIOR OFFICERS, NONCOMS, AND ENLISTED MEN, BUT ALSO TEACHERS, EMPLOYEE ORGANIZATIONS, STUDENTS, ETC.) WHILE THERE ARE ON THE OTHER HAND NO POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS OF PROVEN STRENGTH TO PROCESS THE DEMANDS OF THE POLITICAL NEWCOMERS AND DIRECT THE COURSE OF EVENTS.

3. IT HAS BEEN ALMOST ENTIRELY THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTION, CUSTOM, AND RELIGION WHICH UNTIL NOW HAVE PROVIDED POLITICAL STABILITY FOR THE COUNTRY. ALTHOUGH THE IMPERIAL INSTITUTION PRESENTLY SEEMS LIKELY TO CONTINUE AND TO HAVE SOME IMPORTANCE AS A UNIFYING SYMBOL, IT HAS BEEN THOROUGHLY SHATTERED AS A SUPREME POWER AND THERE SEEMS NO LIKELIHOOD OF ITS REVIVAL IN THAT SENSE. THE OTHER HALLOWED INSTITUTION, THE CHURCH, HAS PROVIDED NO INDICATION IN RECENT YEARS THAT IT IS PREPARED TO PLAY A SIGNIFICANT ROLE AS A POLITICAL FORCE IN ADDIS ABABA. THE CABINET IS A RELATIVELY RECENT INSTITUTION AND CARRIES VERY LITTLE AUTHORITY IN ITS OWN RIGHT. PARLIAMENT HAS THUS FAR BEEN A RATHER INSIGNIFICANT CONGLOMERATION OF LARGELY UNEDUCATED INDIVIDUALS WHO HAD FEW TIES BINDING THEM TO EACH OTHER. IT HAS YET TO DEMONSTRATE REAL COHERENCE, WISDOM, OR AUTHORITY, AND ITS PRESTIGE IS STILL VERY LIMITED. THE INSTITUTION OF POLITICAL PARTIES IS COMPLETELY LACKING AT PRESENT. ALTHOUGH ONE OR MORE PARTIES ARE LIKELY TO SPROUT UNDER THE AEGIS OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION, THEY ARE HARDLY LIKELY TO DEVELOP OVERNIGHT INTO POWERFUL AND STABLE INSTITUTIONS. THE ARMY HAS CONSIDERABLE SIGNIFICANCE AS AN INSTITUTION, BUT ITS STRUCTURE OF AUTHORITY HAS VIRTUALLY BEEN TURNED UPSIDE DOWN AS FAR AS POLITICS IS CONCERNED AND IT HAS HAD NO HISTORICAL EXPERIENCE TO PREPARE IT FOR THE POLITICAL MANAGEMENT OF THE NATION. ALL IN ALL, THEREFORE, THE UNDERDEVELOPMENT OF ETHIOPIAN POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS AT THE PRESENT TIME IS AS SEVERE AS ITS ECONOMIC UNDERDEVELOPMENT.

4. GIVEN THE FUNDAMENTAL INSTITUTIONAL PROBLEM, IT IS NOT SURPRISING THAT THE SPECIFICS OF THE CURRENT POLITICAL SITUATION APPEAR SO CONFIDENTIAL

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UNPROMISING IN TERMS OF POLITICAL STABILITY. A HEATED POWER STRUGGLE HAS BEEN GOING ON BETWEEN PRIME MINISTER LIJ MICHAEL IMRU AND THE ARMED FORCES COORDINATING COMMITTEE (AFCC) REGARDING THE COMPOSITION OF THE CABINET. THE RECENT ESTABLISHMENT OF ANOTHER COORDINATING COMMITTEE TO BETTER BRIDGE THE GAP BETWEEN THE CABINET AND THE AFCC SHOULD BE SOME IMPROVEMENT ON PREVIOUS METHODS OF COMMUNICATION, BUT IT ALSO REFLECTS THE DETERMINATION OF THE AFCC TO REMAIN AT LEAST A COEQUAL BRANCH OF THE PRESENT GOVERNMENT. THE

INABILITY OF THE CABINET TO IMPLEMENT IMPORTANT DECISIONS WITHOUT THE SUPPORT OF THE AFCC HAS ALREADY BEEN STRIKINGLY ILLUSTRATED IN RELATION TO THE PROPOSED RELEASE OF CERTAIN ERITREAN LIBERATION FRONT PRISONERS AS A MEANS OF EXPEDITING NEGOTIATIONS FOR THE RETURN OF THE TENNECO CAPTIVES.

5. THE SITUATION IS FURTHER COMPLICATED BY A PRONOUNCED LACK OF UNITY WITHIN THE ARMED FORCES THEMSELVES. THERE HAS BEEN CONSIDERABLE FRICTION BETWEEN SENIOR AND JUNIOR OFFICERS, BETWEEN YOUNGER AND OLDER MEN, AND BETWEEN THE FOURTH DIVISION AND THE IMPERIAL BODYGUARD. EVEN WITHIN THE GROUP OF JUNIOR OFFICERS, NONCOMS, AND ENLISTED MEN WHOSE FUNDAMENTAL VIEWPOINTS APPEAR RELATIVELY HARMONIOUS, THERE HAVE BEEN STRONG DIFFERENCES OF OPINION ON ISSUES SUCH AS WHETHER THE MILITARY SHOULD OPENLY TAKE OVER CONTROL OF THE GOVERNMENT. THE AFCC HAS BROUGHT MORE ORDER INTO THE DECISION-MAKING PROCESS THAN HAD PREVIOUSLY BEEN THE CASE, BUT THERE IS ALREADY CONSIDERABLE DISSATISFACTION IN THE ARMED FORCES WITH THE AFCC ITSELF. A MAJOR REASON FOR ALL THESE DIFFICULTIES IS THAT NO ONE INDIVIDUAL HAS EMERGED FROM THE MILITARY RANKS AS THEIR ACKNOWLEDGED LEADER. MINISTER OF DEFENSE GENERAL AMAN PROBABLY CURRENTLY ENJOYS THE MOST PRESTIGE IN THE RANKS OF THE MILITARY REFORMISTS, BUT EVEN HIS INFLUENCE ON THE REFORMISTS AS A WHOLE APPEARS TO BE QUITE LIMITED AT THE PRESENT TIME.

6. LOOKING FORWARD TO THE NEXT FEW MONTHS, IT SEEMS LIKELY THAT THERE WILL BE MARKED UNCERTAINTY ON THE PART OF ALL POLITICAL PARTICIPANTS REGARDING THE EVENTS OF THE NEXT WEEK. THERE ARE LIKELY TO BE ADDITIONAL ARRESTS OF PEOPLE WHO HAVE OCCUPIED POSITIONS OF AUTHORITY OR PRESTIGE AND THIS WILL CONTINUE TO HAVE A DEMORALIZING EFFECT ON THE NORMAL CIVIL ADMINISTRATION, WHICH IN SOME AREAS HAS ALMOST COME TO A HALT. WIDE SEGMENTS OF THE POPULATION OF ADDIS ABABA WILL PROBABLY BE INCREASINGLY DISCONTENTED BECAUSE OF THE NON-APPEARANCE OF SIGNIFICANT ECONOMIC BENEFITS
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FOR THEMSELVES, ALTHOUGH THIS DISCONTENT MAY BE PARTIALLY BALANCED BY THE FUNDAMENTAL CHANGE THEY BELIEVE TO BE APPROACHING AS THE ENACTMENT OF THE NEW CONSTITUTION AND THE SUBSEQUENT ELECTIONS COME CLOSER. THE MILITARY REFORMISTS GENERALLY MAY WELL BECOME INCREASINGLY DISSATISFIED THAT THE PRESENT CIVILIAN CABINET DISAGREES WITH THEM ON NUMEROUS ISSUES AND DOES NOT BRING ABOUT RAPID AND STRIKING IMPROVEMENTS IN THE COUNTRY'S CONDITION. SUCH DISCONTENT COULD EASILY BOIL OVER INTO A COMPLETE TAKEOVER BY THE MILITARY OF TOP GOVERNMENTAL POSITIONS AT ANY TIME DURING THIS PERIOD. THE PRIME MINISTER AND CABINET FOR THEIR PART ARE LIKELY TO BECOME INCREASINGLY FRUSTRATED WITH THE CONTINUAL INTERFERENCE OF THE MILITARY IN THEIR DECISIONS; A RESIGNATION BY THE PRIME MINISTER FOR THIS REASON CAN EASILY BE IMAGINED.

7. ALTHOUGH THE REBELLION WHICH BEGAN LAST JANUARY HAS PROBABLY HAD THE LONG-RUN EFFECT OF IMPROVING PROSPECTS FOR THE SWIFTER POLITICAL, SOCIAL, AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF ETHIOPIA, THE SHORT-RUN CONSEQUENCES IN TERMS OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY HAVE THUS FAR BEEN CONSIDERABLE AND ARE LIKELY TO REMAIN SO FOR SOME TIME. A DEGREE OF STABILITY COULD EMERGE FROM THIS SITUATION IF ONE INDIVIDUAL IS SOON ABLE TO ACQUIRE A CLEAR POSITION OF LEADERSHIP. EVEN IN THAT EVENT, HOWEVER, THERE WILL STILL BE A FUNDAMENTAL LACK OF POLITICAL STABILITY BECAUSE OF THE ABSENCE OF INTACT POLITICAL INSTITUTIONS WHICH HAVE ALREADY DEMONSTRATED AN ABILITY TO COPE WITH GREAT POLITICAL PRESSURES.

8. THE QUESTION NATURALLY ARISES OF HOW THIS PROSPECT OF POLITICAL INSTABILITY SHOULD AFFECT U.S. POLICY TOWARDS ETHIOPIA. THUS FAR, AT LEAST, WE DO NOT BELIEVE THAT IT CALLS FOR ANY BASIC CHANGES IN OUR PROGRAMS OF MILITARY, ECONOMIC, AND DROUGHT RELIEF ASSISTANCE. THIS CONCLUSION IS BASED PRINCIPALLY ON OUR BELIEF THAT ANY REGIME WHICH CURRENTLY SEEMS LIKELY TO COME TO POWER HERE IN THE NEXT THREE OF FOUR YEARS WILL PROBABLY BE SUFFICIENTLY WELL DISPOSED TOWARDS THE UNITED STATES SO THAT GOOD RELATIONS BETWEEN THE TWO COUNTRIES WILL STILL BE POSSIBLE AND MUTUALLY BENEFICIAL. IN ADDIS 8564 THE EMBASSY HAS OUTLINED IN MORE DETAIL ITS VIEWS ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE LIKELY POLITICAL INSTABILITY AND OUR MILITARY ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

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